

Keeping our Beaches and Water Clean
Council President Scott Peters, First District
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In February 2000, San Diego experienced one of the largest sewer spills in the city's history. For seven days, 34 million gallons of raw sewage flowed unnoticed through Alvarado Canyon into the San Diego River, closing local beaches for three days and bringing a hefty \$3.4 million dollar fine from the regional water control board. In 2000, there were 365 sewer spills, averaging out to one per day.

When I first campaigned for City Council, I promised to fix our city's embarrassing record on sewer spills. In 2001, we began an aggressive program to replace, clean and monitor the City's 2,880 miles of sewer pipes, and we launched an award-winning program to televise the interior of sewer pipes to alert officials to leaks immediately. I co-chaired the Clean Water Task Force, whose goal was to reduce beach closures by 50% and sewer spills by 25% over the next four years. We exceeded those goals. Sewer spills have dropped by 83% since 2000 and beach closures are down 77%. San Diego is now regularly recognized by beach and water quality groups for clean beaches and bays.

To maintain this good record, we have more work to do. On February 26, the City Council approved a new four-year rate structure that will generate \$430 million in additional revenues, allowing the City to complete planned upgrades to the sewer department as well as replace hundreds of miles of aging and leaky water pipes. These upgrades are required to bring us into compliance with state and federal health and environmental mandates and complete the terms of agreements made with the federal and state governments and environmental groups that sued the city in the early 2000s. The Mayor conducted a "cost of service" study ensure that these increases were distributed fairly among residential and commercial water users, and the Council followed the study's conclusions in approving the rates.

The Mayor and Council included a number of new oversight and efficiency mechanisms in the package we approved. Performance and financial audits will identify efficiencies and areas for improvement. A dedicated reserve for savings from those efficiencies, a "lock box" of sorts, will be used to offset future rate increases. And an Independent Rates Oversight Committee comprised of ratepayers and experts will help the City oversee the water and sewer funds. A conservation incentive will reward water customers who cut back on their water use.

A number of upgrade and replacement projects are scheduled for the First District in the next four years. All areas of the city will enjoy cleaner drinking water and safer beaches once these water and sewer projects are completed. It is my hope that we can pair road resurfacing with water and sewer projects to reduce community impacts, much as we did on several projects in La Jolla including the La Jolla Parkway reconfiguration.

Raising rates is never pleasant, and the City Council hearing on this issue lasted more than seven hours. I believe the public recognizes the fundamental importance of

investing in water and sewer infrastructure; we received protests from only 3% of the City's water and sewer customers. Ultimately, the Mayor and City Council did the right thing for San Diego.